

MINERAL RESOURCES

Purpose

The County recognizes the need to balance the economic benefit of mineral extraction with the protection of people and the environment from potential adverse effects of mining activities.

Introduction

Valuable minerals can be found throughout San Luis Obispo County's physical landscape. Mineral mining dates back to the mid-nineteenth century when copper and coal were first mined. In the early 20th Century, chromite, manganese, and mercury were also mined. Today, mineral extraction consists mainly of sand and gravel mining. (Oil production is addressed in Chapter 5 Energy Resources.) Mineral extraction provides needed raw materials for construction and road base, as examples, and contributes significantly to the county and regional economy. **Appendix 6** provides an overview of mineral resources in the county.

Relationship to Other Elements, Plans, and Programs

Many policies in the water, air quality, soils, and biological resources chapters of this Element and in the Agriculture Element relate to mineral resources. For example, mining of minerals can cause soil erosion, convert farmland, impair downstream water quality, create air quality problems, and affect special status plants and animals. Together, the policies in this Element balance protection of mineral and other resources in order to enable exploitation of important mineral resources while protecting the environment. Refer to **Figure MN-1** for locations of existing mines. The EX (Energy or Extractive Resource Area) and EX₁ (Extractive



We will recognize success when...

- *Valuable mineral resources are extracted in an environmentally sound manner.*
- *Significant aggregate materials are used in a sustainable manner that balances the rate of extraction with the rate of natural replenishment.*
- *There is no loss of opportunities to take advantage of valuable mineral resources due to encroachment of incompatible land uses.*

Resource Area) combining designations (zoning overlays) described in the Land Use Element Framework for Planning contains detailed purpose statements for areas that have been identified as containing or likely to contain significant mineral resources. **Figure MN-2** identifies the areas subject to EX and EX₁ designations. The Land Use Ordinance contains the specific standards for development of mineral extraction, and those standards help implement the following policies.

Major Issues

Mineral resources play an important part in the county's economic vitality. As such, these resources need to be protected so that they are available to the present and future generations that need them.

- 1) Mineral resources must be identified and mapped before they can be protected.
- 2) Protection of mineral resources requires limiting nearby land uses to those that will not be adversely affected by mining activities, and that will not adversely affect mining operations.
- 3) Mining of mineral resources can cause environmental harm. The exploitation of mineral resources needs to be balanced with the environmental effects of mining.

Goals, Policies, and Implementation Strategies

The intent of the following goals, policies and implementation strategies is to identify and protect mineral resources for present and future generations. Extraction of these resources makes a valuable contribution to the county's and the region's economic vitality.



**TABLE MN-1
GOALS FOR MINERAL RESOURCES**

Goal MN 1	Conservation and development of significant mineral deposits will be a high priority, but will be balanced with other County general plan goals and policies.
Goal MN 2	Significant mineral resources will be protected from land uses that threaten their availability for future mining.
Goal MN 3	Balance mining of mineral resources with sensitive natural resources and existing adjacent uses.

GOAL**1**

**CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF
SIGNIFICANT MINERAL DEPOSITS WILL
BE A HIGH PRIORITY, BUT WILL BE
BALANCED WITH OTHER COUNTY
GENERAL PLAN GOALS AND POLICIES.**

Policy MN 1.1 Balance Test

Evaluate proposed mining operations in areas having open space, scenic, habitat, recreational, or agricultural value by balancing these values against the need for extracting mineral resources from such areas.

GOAL**2**

**SIGNIFICANT MINERAL RESOURCES
WILL BE PROTECTED FROM LAND USES
THAT THREATEN THEIR AVAILABILITY
FOR FUTURE MINING.**

Policy MN 2.1 Protect Mineral Resources

Protect mineral and aggregate resources from incompatible uses in designated areas likely to contain significant mineral deposits in order that such deposits may be available for future use. Extract in-stream aggregate materials in a sustainable manner that balances the rate of extraction with the rate of natural replenishment.



An example of mining activities in the county.





An example of mining activities in the county.

◇ ***Implementation Strategy MN 2.1.1 Identify Mineral Extraction Areas***

Continue to identify areas where mineral extraction occurs or is proposed, where mineral reserves of statewide importance exist, and where other significant mineral deposits are or are likely to be found. Amend the Land Use Element to include these areas within the EX and EX₁ combining designations as applicable.

◇ ***Implementation Strategy MN 2.1.2 Aggregate Materials Management Plan***

Require preparation of aggregate materials management plans for watersheds with significant proposed in-stream sand and gravel mining. The management plans shall include, at a minimum:

- 1) Proposed rates of extraction compared to the sustainable rate of natural replenishment of materials for the entire watershed.
- 2) Best practices for sustainable operations that protect water and environmental quality and other properties.
- 3) Identify areas, outside of EX or EX₁ combining designations, where mineral extraction is not appropriate.

Coordinate planned development with development of the Salinas River Watershed Plan (See Implementation Strategy BR 4.1.2).

Policy MN 2.2 Incompatible Development

Protect existing resource extraction operations from encroachment by incompatible land uses, land use category changes, and land divisions that could hinder resource extraction.

Policy MN 2.3 General Plan Amendments

When reviewing general plan amendments in areas that contain mineral reserves of statewide significance and in areas where other significant mineral deposits occur or are likely to occur, give priority to maintaining existing land use categories that allow and are compatible with resource extraction.



Policy MN 2.4 Discretionary Land Use Permits

Require that proposed uses that require a discretionary land use permit will not adversely affect the continuing operation or expansion of an existing extraction use.

◇ ***Implementation Strategy MN 2.4.1 Mineral Resources Report***

For proposed uses other than mineral extraction projects in the EX and EX₁ combining designation, require a mineral resources report, and require that the proposed use will not adversely affect the continuing operation or expansion of a mineral resource extraction use.

GOAL**3****BALANCE MINING OF MINERAL RESOURCES WITH SENSITIVE NATURAL RESOURCES AND EXISTING ADJACENT USES.*****Policy MN 3.1 Environmental effects***

Ensure that all environmental effects are studied before permitting any resource extraction activities (e.g., mining and geothermal development).

Policy MN 3.2 Reclamation

Require the ongoing reclamation of sand and gravel mining areas by implementing reclamation plans. In conformance with state law, require all mining operations to have up-to-date reclamation plans and adequate financial assurances to the satisfaction of the County.

Policy MN 3.3 Environmentally and Visually Sensitive Areas

Extraction operations may be established in designated environmentally or visually sensitive areas only when the Board of Supervisors determines that the need for a particular resource or facility outweighs the value of the sensitive land resource. Such sensitive resources may be subject to extraction operations only when no feasible alternative sites are available.



*We abuse land because
we regard it as a
commodity belonging to
us. When we see the land
as a community to which
we belong, we may begin
to use it with love and
respect.*

—Aldo Leopold

Policy MN 3.4 Site restoration

Require site restoration and rehabilitation as part of the reclamation plan as required by State law.

◇ ***Implementation Strategy MN 3.4.1 Site restoration plans***

Require that applications for proposed extraction operations include plans for preserving the long-term productivity of the site and other affected lands, as well as ensuring on-site and off-site restoration of affected lands. Identify riparian corridors, other sensitive habitats, and Important Agricultural Soils prior to development, and restore and enhance them as a condition of the required land use permit. (Also refer to **Soils Policy SL 3.1.**)

Policy MN 3.5 Best Management Practices

Require that construction and access roads to mining, quarrying, and drilling sites meet County road standards and use Best Management Practices to avoid or minimize environmental impacts. Require that extraction site access routes do not create nuisances, hazards, or road maintenance problems.

◇ ***Implementation Strategy for MN 3.1 – 3.5 Land Use Ordinance Amendments***

Amend Land Use Ordinance, Coastal Zone Land Use Ordinance, and/or Area Plan standards as needed to assure that proposed mineral or oil extraction projects adequately protect environmentally sensitive resources, Important Agricultural Soils, and existing uses. (Also refer to **Soils Policy SL 3.1.**)

Policy MN 3.6 Site Inventory

Maintain an inventory of existing quarries that lists the status of active and inactive quarries and mines and makes recommendations for restoration of uncontrolled and abandoned sites.



FIGURE MN-1
MINING (SMARA) LOCATIONS



**FIGURE MN-2
ENERGY AND EXTRACTIVE RESOURCE AREA LOCATIONS (EX AND EX₁)**



Summary of Implementation Strategies

For each implementation strategy described in this chapter, the following table (**Table MN-2**) summarizes the County department or other agency that has primary responsibility for carrying out that strategy. In addition, the table summarizes the priority, estimated year of initiation, and potential source of funding of each strategy. The actual timeframe for implementing the strategies is dependent upon the availability of adequate staff and funding.

TABLE MN-2
MINERAL RESOURCES IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation Strategy	Responsible Department or Agency ¹	Priority	Timeframe to Start	Possible Funding Sources ²
MN 2.1.1 Mineral Extraction Areas	PB	Medium	2011	DB
MN 2.1.2 Aggregate Materials Management Plan	PB, other agencies	Medium	2011	Grants, other agencies, fees
MN 2.4.1 Mineral Resources Report	PB	High	Immediately	N/A
MN 3.1-3.5 Land Use Ordinance Amendments	PB, AG	Medium	2013	DB
MN 3.4.1 Site restoration plans	PB	High	Ongoing	DB

Notes:

- 1 Department abbreviations:
AG = County department of Agriculture
PB = County Department of Planning and Building
- 2 Funding source abbreviations:
GF = General Fund
DB = Planning and Building Department Budget
- Source: Department of Planning and Building, 2009.

